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# THE BALAWAT GATES

AND THEIR

## RELATION TO ASSYRIAN ART.

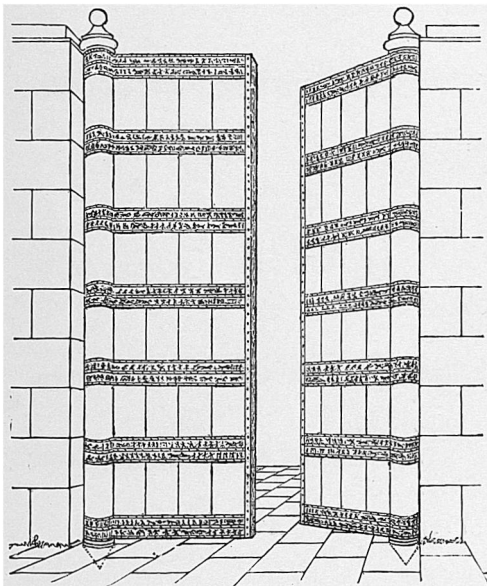


Fig. 1.—BRONZE GATES OF THE TEMPLE OF BALAWAT.  
RESTORATION BY TH. G. PINCHES.

THE mound which bears the name of Balawat is situated about fifteen miles east of Mosul. It has been used for a great many years as a burial-ground by the Sabbaks and other tribes inhabiting the neighborhood, and is completely covered with their graves. In shape it is nearly rectangular, the corners marking the four points of the compass; and it is not unlikely that this outline shows the position of the old city wall, with its ramparts and towers, the bricks of which, after they fell into ruin, were probably carried away to build the houses of the people who succeeded the Assyrians.

Near the northeastern edge of the mound the remains of a temple were found. This was evidently the temple of the deity of the city, named Makhir, who seems to have been one of the gods of war. Within the temple, near the entrance, stood an alabaster coffer, holding two tablets of the same material. Both coffer and tablets contained a short account of the reign of Assur-naşir-

abla, and a fragment of the history of the city. At the northern end of the temple was the altar, with its flight of steps, and upon this altar were portions of an alabaster inscribed tablet, uniform with those discovered in the coffer, but so greatly damaged by fire as to be almost illegible. The only fragment we possess of the history of the city is told in this fourfold inscription, a translation of a portion of which I give here. Assur-naşir-abla says:—

“This city anew I took. I called its name the city of Imgur-Bel. I founded this temple with the bricks of my palace, and I placed an image of the god Makhir in (its) midst. I then went to Lebanon, and cut beams of cedar, cypress, and *tabrini* wood. I placed the beams of cedar upon this temple. I made doors of cedar, and bound copper upon the edge, and arranged them in its gates. I built up and consecrated this temple, and set the god Makhir, the great lord, in the midst, and I placed an inscribed stone tablet in this palace.”

From the lines preceding the above extract it would seem that the city had been in the hands of the people of Kar-Dunias (Babylonia) before the accession of Assur-naşir-abla, and it shows how the power of Assyria had waned under his predecessors. Almost nothing is known of this period of the history of Assyria, so that the fragment of history given in this inscription is doubly important, even though it leaves room for a great many conjectures.

But the mound of Balawat would have been indeed empty, if this small temple, with its altar and inscriptions, had been all that was found there. Let us, therefore, turn our attention to the western half of the mound. Here, also, very few objects were found; but these made up

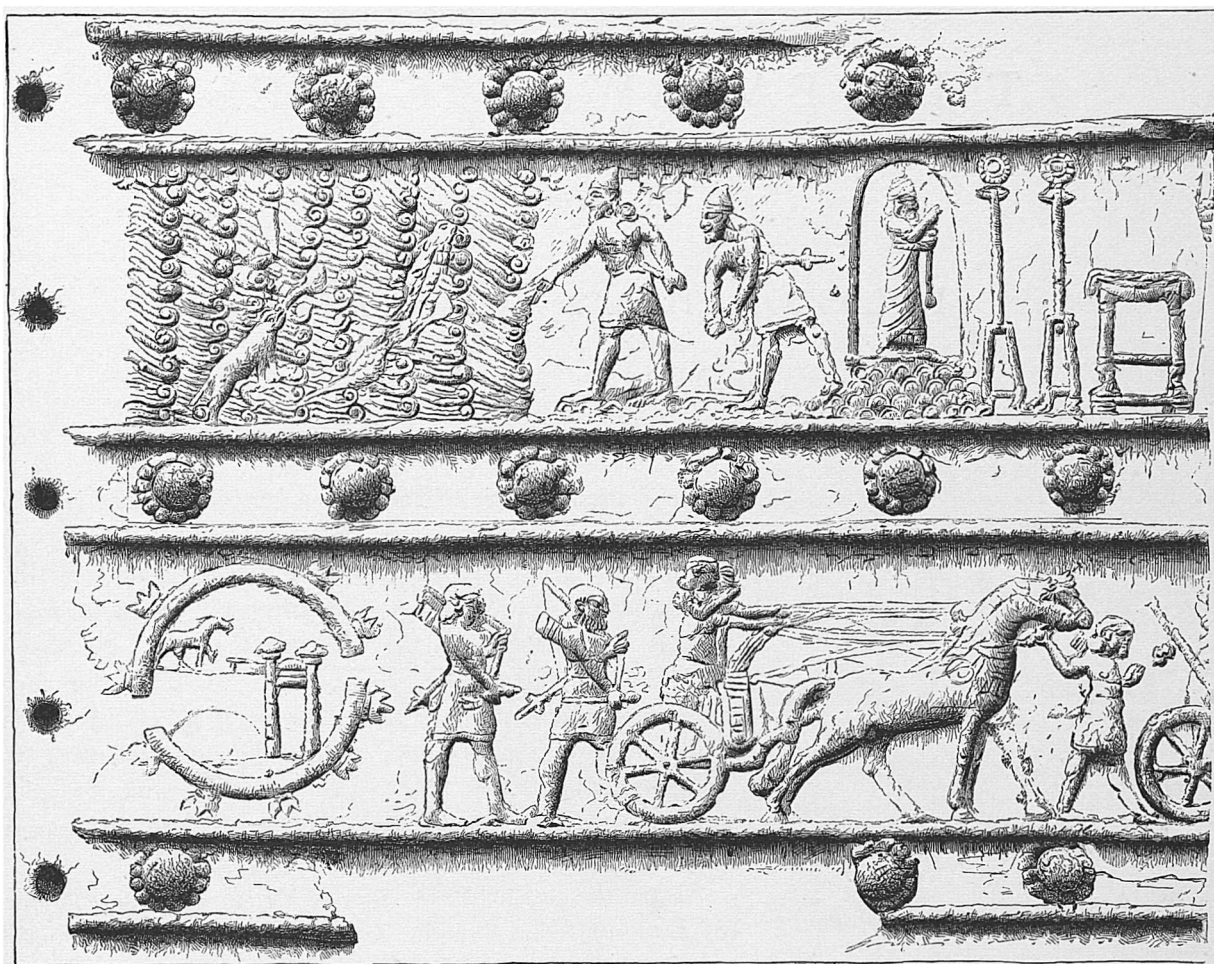


Fig. 2.—BRONZE PLATE FROM THE BALAWAT GATES.—DRAWN BY E. WHITE. (See Fig. 3.)

for deficiency in number by the extraordinary interest they inspired. Here were found four stone platforms, forming, in relation to each other, an irregular square, and near two of them long strips of bronze were discovered. They consisted of two centre-pieces of bronze, from which extended, on each side, other pieces, bent at the ends, the whole giving the idea of gigantic hat-racks. Even though covered with earth, Mr. Rassam, the discoverer, could see that the bronzes were full of chased work, giving representations of battles, sieges, religious ceremonies, etc., of the highest interest.

There were many conjectures, on their arrival in England, as to the use and meaning of these objects. The first thing, however, was to find out the original shape of the plates of bronze which, according to Mr. Rassam's plan, were fixed to the centre-pieces. This, as one or two of the plates still kept a very definite form, it was not difficult to do, and they were put in hand to be cleaned.

It was in the course of the cleaning that the first clew to their real use was obtained, and it was seen that the bands of bronze formed the ornamental coverings of two pairs of gates, the long pieces from which they extended being the edging. It will be needless for me to give here anything more than the dimensions, as the annexed engraving will tell the reader better than any description what the monuments are like. (Fig. 1.)

Each leaf of the larger pair of gates was either 21 or 26 feet high, 6 feet broad, and  $3\frac{1}{8}$  inches thick; the diameter of the cylindrical posts, 14 or 15 inches; the width of each band of bronze, 10 or 11 inches. If straightened out, the length of each band would be 8 feet.

As will be seen from the illustration, there are two rows of chased work on each plate of





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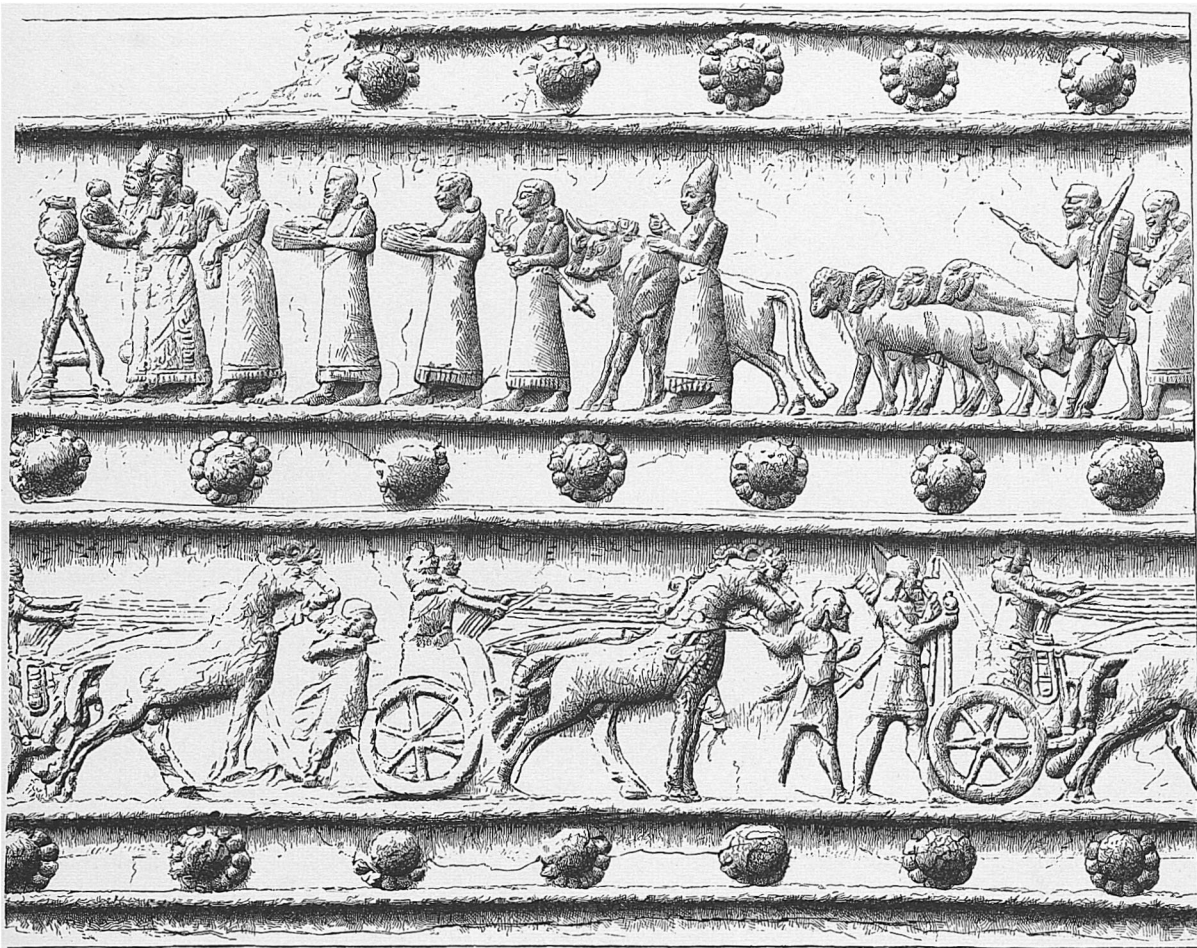


Fig. 3.—CONTINUATION OF FIG. 2.

bronze, with a border formed of plain lines and rosettes, the latter being made by rings of beads, the centres of which were the heads of the nails used in fastening the bronze to the wood-work. The portion of the bronze bands which goes round to the other side of the cylindrical posts has a piece cut out, forming a banner-like end, the use of which is difficult to guess. The edging is also adorned with rosettes, and is covered with a long inscription in five or six columns, running from the top to the bottom, or the reverse, giving the annals of the first nine years of the reign of Shalmaneser II., who reigned from B. C. 860 to 825.

The size of the smaller pair of gates was probably exactly half that of the larger. Unfortunately, they are broken into numberless small fragments. The width of each band, however, was about seven inches, and it contained only one row of chased work, depicting exploits in battle and the hunting-field.

The thirty-five years of the reign of Shalmaneser II., son of Assur-naṣir-abla, seem to have been almost wholly spent in war; for his annals are little else than a long record of victories and cruelties, which, repeating again and again the same form of words, with only the variation in the names of the towns captured, weary the reader by their changeless monotony. In reading these annals, one cannot help wondering at the large number of towns in those districts now so desolate, which he and other kings of Assyria conquered. They must have been inhabited by a race not remarkable for their courage, too, to allow themselves to be defeated by the Assyrian army, which they ought to have outnumbered ten to one. But the truth most likely is, that the Assyrians regarded even the smallest village as a town, and inserted its name to swell the total, and fill up the measure of their own glory.

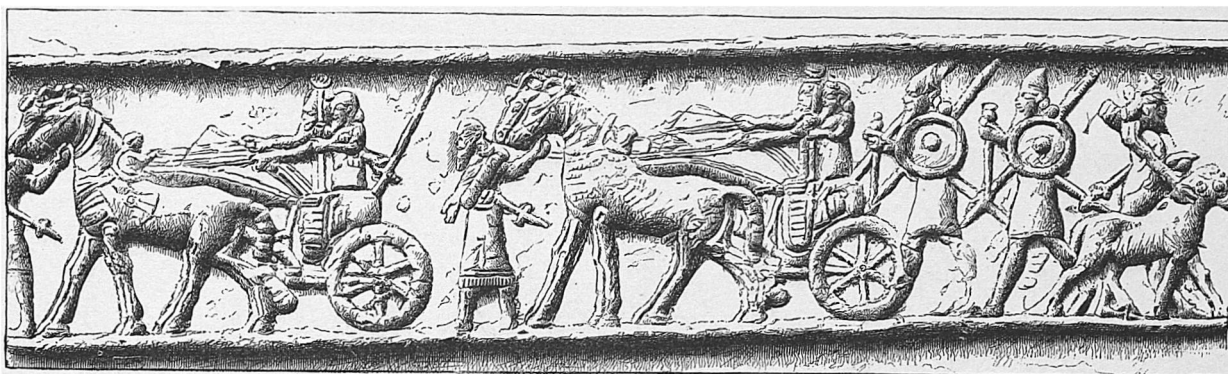


Fig. 4.—FROM THE BALAWAT GATES.—DRAWN BY E. WHITE. (See Fig. 5.)

The expeditions of the reign of Shalmaneser II. may be divided as follows:—

B. C. 859–853. Expeditions to the districts north and west of Assyria, against the countries of Nairi, Ararat, Tul-Barsip, Karkemish, Khupuskiā, and Hamath. It was during these years that he fought against the Syrian league, the leading state in which was Damascus, and the second, Hamath. Ahab of Israel, the Guti,<sup>1</sup> the Egyptians, Arvadites, Arabians, Ammonites, with many other nations, also took part in it. Though Shalmaneser was victorious, it is probable that his army suffered greatly.

B. C. 852–851. Shalmaneser went to Babylon, to help Marduk-suma-iddin, king of Kardunias (Babylonia), against Marduk-bel-u'sātē, his brother, who had revolted against him. Shalmaneser, having defeated Marduk-bel-u'sātē, performed some religious ceremonies at Babylon and Borsippa, of which he gives a highly poetical account in the inscription of the bronze edging of the doors.

B. C. 850–845. Shalmaneser again turned his attention to the Syrian league, and fought a great many battles; but, though he in every case claims the victory, it is evident that he met with but little success. In 845 he went to the sources of the Tigris.

B. C. 844. Shalmaneser invaded the country of Zimri, southeast of Assyria.

B. C. 843. In this year Shalmaneser, for the first time since his ascending the throne of Assyria, was at peace.

B. C. 842. War with Hazael of Damascus. Reception of tribute from *Yahua, abil Khumrī* (Jehu, son of Omri).

B. C. 841. Again a year's rest.

B. C. 840. Again against Hazael, who this time did not attempt any resistance, and the Assyrian army overran the land. The next year he went to Asia Minor to receive the tribute of the chiefs of the country.

For the remainder of the years of Shalmaneser's reign, I give a translation of the Eponym Canon:<sup>2</sup>—

B. C. 838. "To the land of Danabi."<sup>3</sup>—837. "To the land of Tabali" (Tubal).—836. "To the land of Melidi."<sup>4</sup>—835. "To the land of Namri."<sup>5</sup>—834 and 833. "To the land of Que."<sup>6</sup>—832. "To the land of Que. The great god from the city of Diri came."—831. "To the land of Ararat."—830. "To the land of Unqi."<sup>7</sup>—829. "To the land of Ulluba."<sup>8</sup>—828. "To the land of Mannai" (Armenia).—827–824. "Revolt."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Supposed by Sir H. C. Rawlinson to be the Kurds.

<sup>2</sup> This fragment was brought to England by Mr. Rassam in 1879, and is here published for the first time.

<sup>3</sup> Probably west of Assyria.

<sup>4</sup> Melitene (Schrader).

<sup>5</sup> Or 'Simri (supposed to be southwest of Assyria).

<sup>6</sup> Northwest of Assyria.

<sup>7</sup> North (?) of Assyria.

<sup>8</sup> Southwest (?) of Assyria.

<sup>9</sup> For those who wish for a fuller account of the reign of Shalmaneser II., I cannot do better than recommend the *History of Assyria*, by George Smith, one of the series entitled *Ancient History from the Monuments*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London. New York: Pott, Young, & Co.

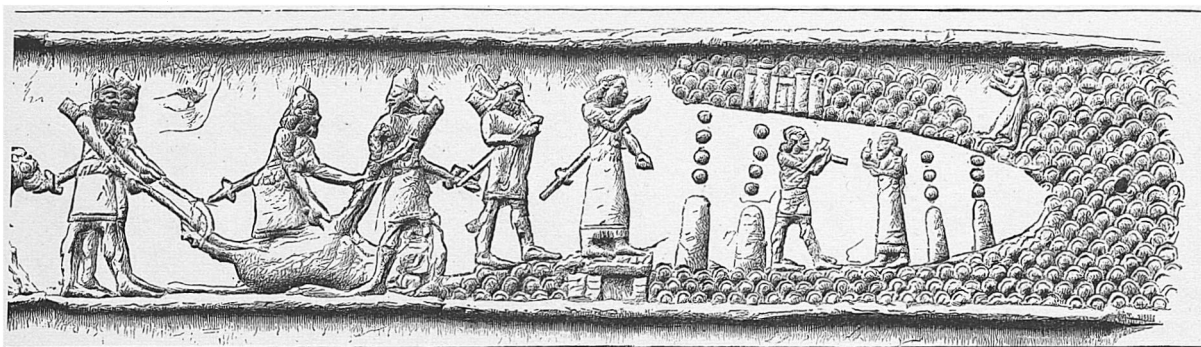


Fig. 5.—CONTINUATION OF FIG. 4.

Let us now turn to the pictures on the bronze plates, and choose from them the best and most striking illustrations of the campaigns of the great king, as far as may be, in chronological order.

The first plate shows Shalmaneser's army approaching a mountainous country, which, we learn from the inscription, is "the land of the Urardhai," or people of Ararat. Strange are the scenes here shown, and excellent is the insight we get into the Assyrian character, with its mixture of enterprise, cool bravery, and still cooler ruthlessness. They come both in their chariots and on foot; and some of the mountaineers, notwithstanding their less effective arms, make bold attempts to withstand them. The Assyrians, however, are always victorious, and the soldiers of Ararat fall on every side. No quarter is given by the victors, and happy is he who asks it not; for if he be killed there is an end of all misery, but if not, the captive's hands and feet are cut off, and he is left to bleed to death.

Farther on we see more of the army of Ararat marching over the steep, rugged hills, to help to resist the invaders, not knowing of the slaughter of their comrades in the plain below. The courage of the foremost man, however, fails him, and, turning to his companions, he seems to warn them against advancing to attack the victorious Assyrians, who are coming on fast.

In the lower tier of pictures we see the result of the expedition,—the payment of a heavy tribute to the Assyrian king by the king of Ararat. The tribute consists of sheep, horses, ibexes, oxen, camels, and bags of gold. Aramē, king of Ararat, heads the procession of tribute-bearers, who come, with folded hands and respectful bearing, into the presence of Shalmaneser. The Assyrian king stands, surrounded by his attendants and a portion of his army, without the royal pavilion, waiting to receive the submissive king.

The Assyrians are armed with sword, dagger, bow, and arrows. The dress of the foot-soldiers consists of a tunic reaching to the knee, the feet are bound with strips of cloth or other material, and the sole of the foot is further protected by a sandal. The shape of the helmet is, as a rule, pointed. The king wears richly-embroidered robes, reaching to the feet, and deeply fringed. The hilt of his sword is richly ornamented. When receiving the tribute-bearers, he holds in the left hand a bow, and in the right hand three arrows, evidently the symbols of the power bestowed on him by the great gods.<sup>1</sup>

The arms of the Araratites consist only of a spear and a small shield. Their helmets, however, are most interesting, for they show the nearest approach to the shape of the helmets of the ancient Greeks that has yet been found on the monuments.

We now turn to another band of bronze, which evidently contains the continuation of the events of this expedition. The Assyrians have left their camp, and are continuing their march

<sup>1</sup> From the inscription on the edging of the gates we learn that this has a religious signification. When Shalmaneser descended to Babylon, it says, speaking of the religious ceremonies he performed there: *Ulabbis qisāti, uqai'sunuti*, "He put on the bows [i.e. clothed himself with the bows], he strang them";—evidently alluding to the carrying of a bow and arrows by the king upon solemn occasions, when, most likely, the former was strung with great ceremony.



Fig. 6.—FROM THE BALAWAT GATES.—DRAWN BY E. WHITE. (See Fig. 7.)

to Lake Van. Chariots, horses, and soldiers are wending their way over the steep, rugged hills, the height of which is so out of proportion, however, that one wonders at the need of such exertion on the part of the soldiers as is there shown in getting the chariot-horses along. It is a grotesque and amusing, but most graphic picture.

Farther on we come to the next halting-place of the army, on the shore of Lake Van. (Figs. 2 and 3.<sup>1</sup>) This is the end of the journey, and the king, who has gone on before, is engaged in making an offering and sacrifice to the great gods who have prospered him hitherto. In solemn state he stands there, with his attendant eunuchs around him bearing offerings of fruit. He holds in his hand a cup tilted, from which he is about to pour a libation. Behind him stand musicians with harps, and farther back still are oxen and sheep for the sacrifice. Before the king stands a tall, hollow-topped table, on which is a vase, and in front of the table a tall object, on the top of which flames are represented. This is evidently the sacred fire. A hollow-topped tripod table with a cloth, two standards showing a disc or ring with fringe (evidently a variant of the winged circle emblematic of the god Assur), and a monolith upon which is carved an almost life-size image of the king, are then shown.

We now see two soldiers casting parts of an ox into the waters of Lake Van. Several fish, attracted by the flesh, are swimming about, hoping evidently to get a morsel. The artist, however, has not confined himself to representations of fish, for we see also a four-footed beast like a young hippopotamus, and another which has been thought to be a young crocodile. The hippopotamus-like beast has already seized a leg of the ox, and is about to devour it. Above this scene may be read the words: "An image over against the sea of the land of Nairi (Lake Van) I set up, sacrifices to my gods I made."

It would be impossible, within the compass of a short paper, to give a description of every scene shown on this interesting monument. We will therefore confine ourselves to those which are most interesting, from the artistic as well as from the antiquarian point of view.

Passing, then, the wearying repetition of besieged cities, which are shown on the next few bands of bronze, we come to one which evidently refers to the events of Shalmaneser's fifteenth year (B. C. 845). First is shown the march of the Assyrian army to the sources of the Tigris, of which we see most likely the closing scenes. Asia, king of Dayeni, hearing of the approach of the Assyrians, comes forth and makes submission. The king of Assyria stands, armed with sword and bow. His eunuchs surround him, and one, standing behind, holds a sun-shade over his royal head. An Assyrian eunuch introduces several of the principal inhabitants of the land to the Assyrian king. There, lying on his face before him, is a man who is evidently the king of Dayeni, and five men and three women, most likely princes and princesses of the land, are in the act of bowing before King Shalmaneser, who, wishing to impress upon these people some idea of the power of Assyria, has ordered a number of chariots to attend. Each contains,

<sup>1</sup> These illustrations were made by permission from the large and beautiful autotype plates now being published by the Society of Biblical Archæology.



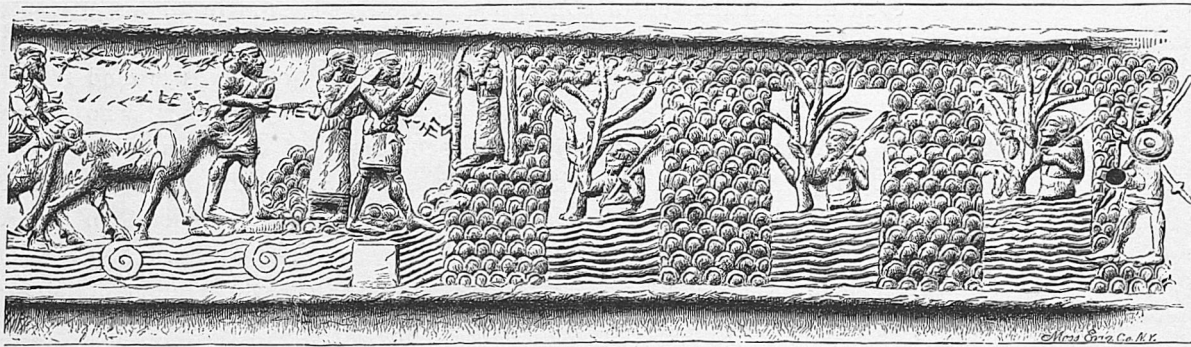


Fig. 7. — CONTINUATION OF FIG. 6.

besides the charioteer, a standard-bearer holding the Assyrian standard,—the tasselled disc emblematic of the god Assur. (Fig. 4.)

The next scene shows either a sacrifice, or else the slaughter of animals for food. Four archers are killing a calf. (Fig. 5.) The animal lies on his back, his legs bound with ropes, which three of the archers hold, while the fourth drives a knife into his vitals. At the same time, another archer is leading a sheep to slaughter.

We now see what is evidently a representation of the amusements of the soldiers. It is a picture of a rocky glen (Fig. 5), on the hither side of which are represented two Assyrian soldiers, who, holding short sticks in their hands, seem to be engaged in striking at each other and parrying,—the Assyrian style of boxing, perhaps. A soldier and a eunuch (who seems to be clapping his hands) are looking on, and a man on the other side of the glen also seems to be applauding. Stretching across the glen are four rows of stone pillars, evidently marking off the limits of some sacred precinct in connection with the temple shown on the other side.

This picture is, perhaps, better than any of the others with regard to the perspective, the figures being made smaller in proportion to their distance from the eye. It may be said, however, that the artist could not *help* making it thus, for he had not room to carry his figures higher. This is true with regard to the figures, but he had room enough to make the temple much higher than it is represented, so that this may really be regarded as a proof that the Assyrian artist had at least a slight idea of perspective.

Passing over the next scene (the first of the second row of pictures), representing the capture and burning of the city of Kuli'si, and the beheading, dismembering, and impalement of the captives,—a scene of harrowing cruelty,—we come to one showing a long procession of archers, armed with bow and quiver, sword, shield, and mace, horsemen bearing shields beset with spikes, chariot-groups, etc., marching along the banks of a river. The king and his immediate attendants, who head the procession, have crossed over to the other side of the river, preceded by two men leading a sheep and a ram. (Figs. 6 and 7.) Now we see three squarely-cut hollows in the rock, evidently intended to represent the caves from which the stream is said to come forth. In each hollow stands a man, the water reaching to his waist, holding in one hand a wand, and in the other apparently a torch. In each hollow a young tree is also represented. On the left-hand side we see a man, with hammer and chisel, carving an image of the king in the rock, while another, standing behind him, directs the work. On the right-hand side stands a soldier, fully armed, evidently to protect the bathers. The inscription reads: "From the heads of the river Tigris I descended, victims to the gods I sacrificed, an image of my majesty I caused to be set up."

Reluctantly, however, we must leave our description of the other scenes, though there are many equal in interest with those already described, to say a few words about the art of Assyria, its beauties and short-comings, its triumphs and failures.

There is no doubt that, as an artist, the Assyrian was highly gifted, and this shows itself



Fig. 8. —GUDEA, VICEROY OF ZERGHUL.

DRAWN BY T. G. PINCHES.

From a Bronze Figure in the British Museum.

even through the veil of conventionality which is seen in all his attempts at adornment. It may well be asked, Whence did the Assyrians get such an excellent idea of reproducing the forms of things around them? The earliest specimens are of the time of Assur-našir-abla, who began to reign in 885 B. C., and in these sculptures we see already most perfect representations, on a large scale, sculptured with the utmost care and attention to details. There is absolutely nothing earlier than these: Assyrian art comes before us at almost the highest excellence it ever reached. We have no records of a learning-time, no monuments showing their gradual attainment of excellence in art.

All this implies what we also get an inkling of in their literature, namely, that the Assyrians lived for a long time with a people of far greater intelligence than themselves, but who, being less in number, gradually merged in them. These people were called Sumerians, that is, inhabitants of the plain of Sumer, or *Shinar*. From these people the Assyrians had their syllabic system of writing, which we call "wedge-shaped," their mythology, and, it is only reasonable to suppose, their ideas of art, in which the Sumerians had already, at between 2000 and 3000 B. C., made great progress. The Sumerian art, however, was only the groundwork upon which the Assyrians built a structure of their own. Sumerian art was, like the Sumerians themselves, polished, refined, graceful. They were tall and slim of person, soft and refined of feature: the Assyrians, on the contrary, though not short, were thick-set, with features sensual and unrefined. All who have seen the small bronze figures of Gudea, Viceroy of Zergul (Fig. 8), in the British Museum, have most likely noticed the slim, graceful form, and the soft, calm, dignified features, as, kneeling on one knee, with his horned cap on his head, he holds with both hands the cone inscribed with his name and titles and the record of his pious works.<sup>1</sup> Those, too, who have studied the representations on the engraved cylinder seals will at once have seen that these are the work of the people who carved the bronze images of this ancient viceroy. Though the style of Assyrian art is altogether different, yet we can trace in the proportions of the figures and their attitudes a certain similarity, which, making allowance for the difference of time, implies that Assyrian art, if not actually derived from that of the Sumerians, yet was greatly influenced by it, and by the religion which the Assyrians inherited from the Sumerians.

On the groundwork supplied by the Sumerians the Assyrians built their own vigorous style. Observant by nature, the Assyrian soon learnt how to portray both animate and inanimate objects with great fidelity. Indeed, in some cases his attempts show a too great desire to be true to nature, and he spoils the effect of his work by a too close attention to details, because he did not know how to make those details subservient to the general effect of the whole. This is especially the case with regard to the monument we are now considering. The artist, it will be noticed, has marked the position of every prominent muscle in the figures of men and horses,<sup>2</sup> not noticing that, even had his tools been fine enough, yet the general effect of the whole would be marred by it. It is easy to see, however, the design of the artist in doing this. He had observed how a few lines would give effect, and produce upon the mind the idea of strength; so he added them, and from this we have a true description of the Assyrian character, for the art of every nation has a special feature of its own, expressing the character of the

<sup>1</sup> The figure here represented has been chosen out of the three in the British Museum, because, although in a much worse state of preservation than the other two, it is better proportioned, and the features are much more pleasing. The sleepy expression of the face is caused by the decay of the bronze.

<sup>2</sup> In many cases, however, these lines are lost through the decay of the bronze.



Fig. 9. — BAS-RELIEF ON AN ASSYRIAN SLAB IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

DRAWN BY E. WHITE. — FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

people, and it has been truly said that, while the characteristic of Egyptian art is repose, and that of Greek art beauty, that of Assyrian art is *power*. With a high hand they conquered nations, and subdued all who resisted them, and with a loud voice they proclaimed it to the world. Throughout their life as a nation this seems to have been the end and object of their existence.

The process used to produce the pictures on the bronze was that of chasing, the figures having been punched out on the back, and finished off, by engraving the details, on the obverse. The inscriptions were produced, however, in a rougher manner, for round each character the bronze has sunk, implying that a hammer and chisel were used. The work of two different artists is plainly visible in the production of the pictures. It was the custom among the Assyrians to make first a careful model in clay of the scenes to be reproduced, and it is not unlikely that this was the case with the pictures on the gates, so that the designer and the chaser were probably different persons. One of the most interesting objects brought from Nineveh by Mr. Rassam last year is a clay model of Assur-bani-abla killing a lion. A similar representation (Fig. 9) is to be found on one of the slabs in the Assyrian basement room of the British Museum, for which, most likely, the clay was the model, and it is easy to see that, excellent as the reproduction in stone is, yet the clay original, even in its mutilated condition, is far better.<sup>1</sup> Future years will, it is to be hoped, bring to light many more proofs of the skill of the Assyrian sculptors.

THEOPHILUS GOLDRIDGE PINCHES.

<sup>1</sup> An inscription which accompanies a similar scene may be translated as follows:—"I, Assur-bani-abla, king of multitudes, king of the land of Assur, by my courage on my feet, a powerful lion of the desert by his ears grasped, and by the help of Assur and Istar, goddess of battle, with the spear of my hand I pierced his body."